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RR RUEHLN RUEHSK RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHDBU #0487 1140949  
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R 240949Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0456  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0242  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0089

UNCLAS DUSHANBE 000487

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA AND PA/PR/FPCW

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [KDEM](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: THE RICHARD BOUCHER FAN CLUB - TAJIKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT PRESS APPARATUS

¶1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified - Not for Internet Distribution.

¶2. (SBU) MFA Spokesman Davlat Nazriyev summoned PAO April 22 for questioning, along with his deputy and the director for Europe and North America, to discuss why the embassy's press office had failed to inform the official news agency Khovar about Assistant Secretary Boucher's press conference April 21.

¶3. (SBU) PAO expressed regret that the official agency had not known about the event and said she did not know why it had missed the announcement. She said the embassy had no intention of excluding any media, since it always tried to be as inclusive as possible, and would certainly do whatever necessary to make sure Khovar was informed in future.

¶4. (SBU) She expressed puzzlement that the agency had not known about the press conference, since the press center where it was held operates under the auspices of the MFA. She further explained that Khovar had been present at the Presidential Administration (PA) for the Assistant Secretary's press walkout after his April 20 meeting with President Rahmon. At that time, the moderator welcomed all media present to the short event and invited them to the full press conference the next day. PAO asked whether Khovar had perhaps chosen to cover the press event with the Secretary General of NATO's Parliamentary Assembly taking place at the same time on April 21 at the Presidential Administration.

¶5. (SBU) The spokesman said that wasn't the case, Khovar had not known and really wanted to cover our press conference. He said he wanted the MFA information service to cooperate more fully with the embassy on press events to prevent the spread of rumors and mentioned an article he had just in the Russian press claiming the United States was not interested in cooperation with Tajikistan. He said his office assisted other foreign missions with arranging press events at Tajik Government venues and would be happy to help us as well.

¶6. (SBU) PAO said "spasiba," but that the embassy press office had no need, because our own assistant was "like an army" in arranging events. Our press assistant told the PAO later she had indeed invited Khovar, via the listserv, and followed up as she always does with phone calls to government press assistants, since they don't always check their email.

17. (SBU) Comment: It seems our Assistant Secretary made a very strong impression on the Tajik government, maybe by his response to the question about whether the United States could still trust the Tajiks with expanding economic cooperation and the transit of goods to Afghanistan, given the International Crisis Group's report, "Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure."

Boucher's classic response: "They [scholars] write reports and we make the policy... We'll continue to work together in areas where we both benefit. Policy comes from the elected leaders of the United States. And that's what they want, so that's what we'll continue to do."

18. (SBU) Comment continued: Someone at a high level was probably chagrined not to see more of the Assistant Secretary on the evening TV news and started "kicking down," so the MFA decided to make the embassy press office the scapegoat. Getting ready to depart, the PAO held up a transcript and joked that she had been ready to discuss statements made at the press conference. The spokesman said on the contrary, he very much appreciated Mr. Boucher's press events and looked forward to closer cooperation.

In parting, the Europe and North America director saw the PAO off and asked whether it was true that Mr. Boucher was married to Christiane Amanpour. She said no, that was Jamie Rubin.

JACOBSON